

Families with Teens

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Information Series for Parents and Caregivers of Teens

Discipline versus Punishment

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When we talk about “discipline versus punishment,” parenting young children often comes to mind. Knowing the difference between discipline and punishment is also important when parenting teens.

Discipline mean to “teach.” Discipline helps teens learn what to do and helps teens and parents feel good about themselves. Discipline is a positive way to teach a teen self-control and confidence that emphasizes nurturing and guidance. With discipline, parents use strategies to prevent problems plus guidance to manage conflict. Punishment is a parenting tool used after a problem surfaces.

The characteristics of discipline include: 1) focuses on what the teen needs to do in the future, 2) relates to the misbehavior, 3) helps the teen develop self discipline and learn how to become responsible, and 4) intended to help the teen accept natural or logical consequences of the misbehavior.

On the other hand, punishment: 1) focuses on what’s wrong instead of what needs to be done right, 2) consists of penalties or restrictions that often have nothing at all to do with the misbehavior, 3) puts responsibility for enforcement on the parent instead of encouraging the teen to become responsible for his/her actions, and 4) concerned with making the teen “pay” for what he/she did wrong.

Take the example of a teen skipping school regularly and “hanging out” at the mall in a nearby town. Possible punishments could include: revoking driving privileges, cutting off the teen’s allowance, prohibiting phone use, grounding, banning TV and forbidding the teen to go to the mall.

There are several possible discipline strategies. Parents need to listen to the teen’s feelings and concerns about school. Together, parent and teen discuss options for addressing the problem. Parents, teen and teachers could meet to figure out what

needs to be done about missed classes. That doesn't mean there won't be some privileges taken away for a time, but that alone would do nothing to solve the core problem.

Parents could also use the if/then parenting tool. This means helping the teen understand that if he or she attends school and completes the work, then other privileges will be available such as being able to go to the mall.

Prepared by Colleen Gengler, Family Relations Specialist, 2000; Reviewed by Kathleen Olson, Family Relations Specialist, 2005.

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For more information on families with teens, check out these resources:

Teen Talk: School Issues – A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08129
Teen Talk: Youth Choices – A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08130
Teen Talk: A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #07938
<http://www.parentingteens.che.umn.edu/TeenTalk.htm>

Thriving With Your Teen, #07752, <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7643.html>

The Growing Season: A Parent's Guide to Positive Parenting of Teens, #07607 – video/booklet package
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7607.html>

#07776 booklet only
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7776.html>

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